

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SSC-01

AID-05 EB-07 CIEP-01 TRSE-00 STR-04 OMB-01 CEA-01

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R 121743Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1909

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: POLITICAL REACTION TO CABINET CHANGES: THE WAR
THAT WASN'T

REF: LONDON 8915

SUMMARY - PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY (PLP) REACTION TO CA-
BINET SHAKE-UP (REFTEL) HAS BEEN SHARP, BUT LESS DRAMATIC
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THAN DEPICTED BY MUCH OF MEDIA. REPORTS OF RIGHT-WING

MUSCLE FLEXING AND IMPENDING SUB-CABINET CHANGES HAVE ADDED TO THE TRIBUNE GROUP'S DISSATISFACTION WITH WILSON, BUT THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE THEY CAN DO ABOUT IT. AS LONG AS CONSERVATIVES WISH TO AVOID A GENERAL ELECTION -- AS APPEARS TO BE THE CASE NOW AND IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE-- THE PLP LEFT-WING'S ABILITY TO INFLUENCE POLICY WILL GENERALLY BE AT THE MARGIN. END SUMMARY

1. REACTION TO JUNE 10 CABINET CHANGES FROM THE PLP LEFT, HAS BEEN HEATED, IF NOT AS BITTER AND DRAMATIC AS DEPICTED BY SOME OF THE MEDIA (E.G., JUNE 12 GUARDIAN HEADLINED: "LEFT-WINGERS DECLARE WAR ON WILSON"). LOUDEST PROTESTS, AS IS USUALLY THE CASE, HAVE COME FROM TRIBUNE GROUP WHICH JUNE 11 RELEASED LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER WILSON WHICH REJECTED "THE ACCEPTANCE OF COALITION POLICIES...AS REFLECTED BY YOUR RESHUFFLE OF MINISTERS" AND PROMISED THAT GROUP WILL FIGHT TO ENSURE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF PARTY MANIFESTO. THIS ACTION FOLLOWED SPECIAL TRIBUNE MEETING REPORTEDLY ATTENDED BY ABOUT 40 OF THAT GROUP'S 76 MEMBERS. TRIBUNITES WERE ESPECIALLY DISTURBED BY REPORT (CORRECT, WE UNDERSTAND) THAT HOME SECRETARY ROY JENKINS INTERVENED WITH WILSON, GOING SO FAR AS TO THREATEN HIS OWN RESIGNATION, TO KEEP REG PRENTICE IN CABINET (REFTEL). A COMMONS STATEMENT BY JUDITH HART, IN WHICH SHE OPINED THAT CABINET SHAKE-UP REPRESENTED FIRST STEPS TOWARD "HISTORIC CATASTROPHE FOR LABOR PARTY" AND REPORTS OF IMPENDING SUB-CABINET CHANGES FURTHER INTENSIFIED LEFT-WING FEARS AND RESENTMENT.

2. SUB-CABINET CHANGES, EXPECTED TO BE ANNOUNCED JUNE 12, REPORTEDLY INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING: ERNEST ARMSTRONG, EDUCATION UNDERSECRETARY, TO FILL VACANT TRANSPORT MINISTRY POSITION (REFTEL); JOAN LESTOR, FCO UNDERSECRETARY TO REPLACE ARMSTRONG AT EDUCATION; EDWARD ROWLANDS, WELSH UNDERSECRETARY TO REPLACE LESTOR AT FCO; ALEC JONES, SOCIAL SECURITY UNDERSECRETARY TO REPLACE ROWLANDS AT WELSH OFFICE; MIKE MEACHER, INDUSTRY UNDERSECRETARY TO REPLACE JONES AT SOCIAL SECURITY; AND GERALD KAUFMAN, ENVIRONMENT UNDERSECRETARY, TO REPLACE MEACHER AT INDUSTRY. WITH THESE CHANGES, TWO POSITIONS WOULD STILL REMAIN VACANT: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AN ENVIRONMENT UNDERSECRETARY SLOT AND THE INDUSTRY UNDER
SECRETARY SLOT VACATED YESTERDAY BY GREGOR MACKENZIE
(REFTEL). PLP'S LEFT IS MOST DISTURBED OVER THE REPORTED
PLANS TO MOVE MEACHER AND LESTOR. THE FORMER, IF IT DE-
VELOPS, MEANS THAT TONY BENN'S ENTIRE INDUSTRY TEAM, SAVE
MACKENZIE (A RIGHT-WINGER), WILL HAVE BEEN REPLACED.

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3. COMMENT: THE TRIBUNE GROUP'S REACTION TO ACTUAL AND ANTICIPATED GOVERNMENT CHANGES WAS PREDICTABLE. THE LEFT-WINGERS PERCEIVE RECENT EVENTS AS FULFILMENT OF THEIR WORST EXPECTATIONS, BELIEVING THAT THEY SIGNAL WILSON'S RETREAT FROM THE MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS. THEY ALSO FEAR THAT WITH THE REFERENDUM OUT OF THE WAY HE WILL PUSH ECONOMIC MEASURES WHICH PLACE A DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE OF THE BURDEN ON THOSE AT THE LOWER END OF THE ECONOMIC SCALE. IT SEEMS TO US, HOWEVER, THAT THE EC REFERENDUM RESULT AND THE SHAKE-UP PRESAGE MORE OF CHANGE IN STYLE THAN IN OBJECTIVES OF GOVERNMENT POLICY, THOUGH TOUGHER ECONOMIC MEASURES ARE EXPECTED, AND THEY COULD WELL IMPACT MOST HEAVILY ON THE LEAST ADVANTAGED. MOST SIGNIFICANTLY, HOWEVER, THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS THAT THE TRADE UNIONS SHARE TRIBUNE VIEW.

4. TO A LARGE EXTENT THE THREATS IMPLIED IN THE TRIBUNE GROUP LETTER RING HOLLOW. THE FACT, ACKNOWLEDGED AT LEAST BY THE MORE REALISTIC TRIBUNITES, THAT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY WISHES TO AVOID A GENERAL ELECTION AS MUCH AS DOES WILSON MEANS THAT ABILITY OF PLP'S LEFT-WING TO INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT POLICY IS, IN MOST CASES, MARGINAL. AS LONG AS THIS CONDITION PREVAILS -- AND THERE APPEARS TO BE LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF CHANGE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE -- AND THE WILSON GOVERNMENT IS WILLING TO MAKE SOME RELATIVELY MINOR ACCOMMODATIONS, CONSERVATIVE ACQUIESANCE OR EVEN SUPPORT CAN BE COUNTED UPON. IN SOME RESPECTS THIS ARRANGEMENT IS A KIND OF DEFACTO COALITION, BUT IT DOES NOT REQUIRE THE COMPROMISE OR REPUDIATION OF MAJOR LABOR PARTY POLICY OBJECTIVES. THIS TACIT COOPERATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION ACCENTUATES THE TRIBUNITES' SUSPICION AND HOSTILITY, BUT WOULD MAKE OPEN "WAR" A FUTILE EXERCISE.

RI CHARDSON

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